

1) Palmer Hayden

(1890-1973)

The Janitor Who Paints

ca. 1930

Oil on canvas

39 1/8 by 32 7/8 inches

Notable 20th century painter.

By the 1940s, Palmer Hayden was known for his narrative scenes of New York's urban life and the rural South: Black subjects going about their daily lives. Hayden perhaps intended ***The Janitor Who Paints*** as a "protest painting," honoring a fellow artist who was known as "the janitor" instead of the more fitting title, "the painter." The painting might also be a self-portrait and a statement on adversity.

2) Clementine Hunter

(c. 1886-1988)

Zinnias in a Pot

1965

Oil on board

32 by 28 inches

In 1940 Clementine Hunter, a native of Louisiana, began painting on anything she could find: cardboard boxes, soap cartons, paper bags, pieces of lumber, scraps of plywood, window shades, glass bottles, plastic milk jugs, cast iron pots, paperboard and canvas board. Her subjects can be divided into three broad categories—work, play, and religion. A prolific artist with no formal training, Hunter sold her early paintings for as little as 25 cents. By the 1980s, her work was fetching thousands of dollars. Museums and galleries have exhibited her work frequently since 1945. In 1986, Hunter was awarded the Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree from Northwestern State University in Louisiana.

3) Jacob Lawrence (see also no. 11)

(1917-2000)

Dreams No. 2

1965

Tempera on fiberboard

35 3/4 by 24 inches

This painting is one of Lawrence's most enigmatic images. It is an intensely psychological painting. It shows a woman slumped in a chair, several pieces of paper on the floor below her hand. Through windows we glimpse scenes of a wedding that seems to be playing out in the woman's mind.

4) Henry Ossawa Tanner

(1850-1937)

Street in Tangier

ca. 1910

Oil on fiberboard

13 5/8 by 10 1/2 inches

Working in France after 1891, Henry Ossawa Tanner became known internationally for his religious paintings. They reflect Tanner's upbringing as a minister's son and also his visits to the Holy Land and Tangiers after 1897. Tanner worked in the Naturalist and genre traditions of American art, and his early depictions of humble black folk about their daily lives are regarded as classic statements of African American pride and dignity. Tanner's later works, influenced by his travels to Tangiers and the Holy Land, focused on Biblical subjects.

5) William H. Johnson

(1901-1970)

The Reader

1939

Tempera on paper

24 by 18 inches

In the late 1930s, Johnson began to paint works from memory, creating images of farming, family, and religious life in rural South Carolina. In the early 1940s, Johnson accomplished his goal: "the painting of my own people." He translated the intensity of his European-based expressionism into a naïve-primitive style that depicted vibrant characters and cultures of black life as well as religious and historical themes.

6) Charles White

(1918-1979)

We Have Been Believers

c. 1940

Charcoal on paper

21 1/2 by 18 1/2 inches

Charles White is recognized for the richness of his graphic work and his realist mural paintings, which typically depict aspects of the history, culture, and life of African Americans. In the 1940s, White set out to use his talents to alter the preconceived "black image" in America. Many of his works convey his deep respect for labor and the common man. One of the finest draftsmen in modern America, White was elected a full member of the National Academy of Design in 1972. Charles White taught at the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles from 1965 until his death in 1979.

7) Claude Clark

(1915-2001)

Resting

1944

Oil on canvas

30 by 25 inches

Claude Clark was born in Rockingham, Georgia. He taught art after 1948 in Alabama and California and researched the roots of African American art in Africa, specifically Ghana and Egypt. Over the years, Clark painted an odyssey showing Black people and their journey in the African Diaspora. There are times when Clark's odyssey takes us to places such as Haiti; Egypt; Nigeria; Mobile, Alabama; and the suburbs of the city of Philadelphia. He also expressed his feelings about social injustice in his art. He loved to explore form and communicate his vision of the world. In this painting, he takes us back to the American South, with a title that is literal but also suggests the Biblical concept of "resting in the Lord."

8) Bill Traylor

(1846-1949)

Man on Crutch and Woman with Umbrella
ca. 1939-1942

Crayon and tempera on paperboard sheet
17 ¼ by 11 ¼ inches

From 1939 to 1942, Bill Traylor recorded the life around him with untutored but intuitive artistry. A slave and then a free farmhand on the George Traylor Plantation near Benton, Alabama, Bill Traylor moved to Montgomery in 1938 following the death of his wife and the Traylors when he was 84. Circumstances soon left him penniless. In 1939, Traylor began to draw on discarded laundry cardboard, aided by a measuring stick, while he sat in front of the local pool hall observing Montgomery's Monroe Street market. Forceful, enigmatic, and fanciful, his images depict a former life as well as city people in his daily life. In this drawing, the man might be telling an exciting story, but the umbrella and the crutch, oddly, also suggest a dance—with props.

9) Romare Bearden (see also no. 12)

(1912-1988)

The Piano Lesson
1983

Collage on board
29 by 22 inches

Throughout his career, Bearden explored mythological, religious and musical themes. He is best known for his revolutionary use of collage and photomontage. A founding member of Spiral, a group promoting civil rights in the visual arts, Bearden sought to relate the work of African American artists to the struggle for racial equality and the complexity and beauty of black American life.

10) Irene Virginia Clark

(1927-1984)

Man with Glass
c. 1954

Oil on Board
9 by 7 inches

Born in Washington, DC, Irene Clark was a painter, designer, instructor, and lecturer who studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, where she did extensive research on African Culture and Art. The simplicity of form found in her work invokes a folk art approach. Many of her artistic themes are based upon myth, mysticism, and folklore.

11) Jacob Lawrence (see also no. 3)

(1917-2000)

Genesis Creation Sermon II: And God Brought Forth the Firmament and the Waters

1989

Gouache on paper

29 ¾ by 22 inches

Beginning in 1937, Lawrence created series on figures and subjects such as Toussaint L'Ouverture, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and the Great Migration of the Negro. Combining a graphic modernist style with narrative text, Lawrence made these historical lives and events accessible to all. A skilled colorist and a gifted story-teller with a social conscience, Lawrence's work also focused on memories of African American urban life as it unfolded around him in the Harlem of his early years.

12) Romare Bearden (see also no. 9)

(1912-1988)

Pepper Jelly Lady
1980

Color lithograph on paper sheet
26 by 21 1/8 inches

In 1935, Bearden began work with tempera on classical themes. Then in 1940 he became interested in flat painting. Bearden experimented with techniques between the late 1950s and early 1960s. His photomontages, inspired by the civil rights movement, made his fame and ended his career as a social worker in New York City. In coming years, he continued to innovate, making art inspired by his Southern roots but with new techniques, and then producing art that exploded with colors he saw in the Caribbean.

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